

Police Testify on Raid at Panthers' Building

Special Unit Members Give Details About Meeting Gunfire as They Tried to Enter

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Members of a special police unit who were fired on as they tried to enter Black Panthers headquarters last month told details of the incident Thursday at a preliminary hearing for Negro militants arrested during the raid.

Sgt. David T. McGill said a 25-man Special Weapons and Tactics Team made the raid on the headquarters at 4115 S. Central Ave. Its assignment was to gain entry to the building and make it possible for other policemen to search the structure, he said.

The team members, wearing black jump suits and some wearing protective vests, were armed with sawed-off shotguns, semi-automatic rifles and tear gas. They moved on the building at 5:30 a.m., Dec. 8, McGill said.

Provided Protective Fire

The sergeant testified that he stationed men with rifles on the roof of the Panther building, on the building across the street and at other key locations to provide protective fire.

Then he and four men approached one of the two front doors with a battering ram as a second group of four officers did the same at the other door, he continued.

McGill said he ordered the occupants to open the door. Hearing no response, he ordered the door rammed. Two officers struck the door with the ram five times and it opened, he testified.

Those officers, according to testimony, fell back and took position to give protective cover fire for the two men assigned to charge into the building.

When the door broke down, according to testimony, the officers found themselves facing a spotlight aimed from inside the building making it impossible to see into the darkened room.

Threw Himself Through Door

Officer James L. Segars said he charged past the two men in a kneeling position and threw himself across the threshold with his head and shoulders inside the doorway.

Eugene Trinkler, the other officer assigned to enter, said he charged along with Segars but stopped short of the doorway when he saw the light inside. The officers said about 10 seconds passed while they lay in prone positions.

When there was no response from within, they said McGill ordered them to move up.

"I started to raise up," Segars testified, "and a shot was fired—a shotgun blast—from straight ahead. This was followed by fire from a larger-caliber rifle to the right. Then firing broke out from two more locations.

'Lying in the Street'

"The next thing I knew, I was lying in the street . . ."

Other officers said they saw Segars knocked backwards by the shotgun blast, and saw him collapse in the street.

Another policeman testified that he saw three shots fired from a window in the headquarters building, strike Segars in the back as he lay prone. Segars, however, was uninjured by those bullets because of the protective vest he wore.

Trinkler said he fired a single blast from his shotgun, aiming at the "orange puffs coming from an automatic rifle," and then rolled to safety on the south side of the door. There he lay prone, directly under a bunker built on that side of the entryway.

"It was this bunker," said Trinkler, "that was firing at Sgt. Segars."

Trinkler said he thrust the barrel of his shotgun into the bunker, fired once, and then crawled to safety.

Sgt. Calvin R. Drake, one of the men assigned to the battering ram, was wounded by a bullet, officers

testified, as were two other officers.

Sgt. McGill testified that he saw officer Edward Wuerfel fall to the sidewalk.

"He tried to get up," Sgt. McGill continued, "and Sgt. (Edward C.) Williams went over to help. He was shot down."

McGill said he and his men dragged the wounded officers to safety. Then he ordered his crew to withdraw from the building.

He ordered tear gas fired into the premises when the withdrawal was complete, the sergeant said, and supporting officers opened fire on the building.

After four hours of this, he testified, the Panthers surrendered.

Sgt. McGill said only 10 officers, all members of his team, fired on the building at any time—and that, by actual count of used ammunition, a

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total of 300 rounds were expended.

The hearing was interrupted briefly Thursday when the Panthers charged with conspiracy to commit murder refused to identify themselves, on advice of their attorney, Leo Branton Jr. He said such self-identification was an invasion of their civil rights.

Attorney Refuses

Municipal Judge James H. Brown ordered Branton to advise his clients to answer the questions of Dep. Dist. Atty. Stephen S. Trott, who had asked for the identification, but Branton refused to do so.

A compromise was reached when Trott suggested that a bailiff read the names on the identification wristbands worn by prisoners.

This plan, however, was discarded after the defendants were seen to switch bands with one another.

Judge Brown then repeated his order to Branton.

Branton again refused.

Trott approached the two defendants who are presently free on bail and thus do not sit with the other defendants in the

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courtroom, asking McGill, who was still on the stand, to identify them.

McGill said he could not.

"Will those defendants," said Trott, "please correctly identify themselves?"

"I am instructing you to say nothing," Branton told his clients.

The clients remained silent.

"Your honor," said Trott, "I move at this time to revoke bail and place them in custody. How do we know these people are who they claim to be?"

Judge Brown called a recess and took both attorneys into his chambers.

After a brief session there, Branton instructed his clients to identify themselves if asked.